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ROBERT E. LEE.



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ROBERT E. LEE.

Lee, ROBERT EDWARD, was fifth in descent from Richard Lee of Shropshire, England, who emigrated to Virginia in the reign of Charles I. The ancestor of the Lee family in Virginia received large grants of land located between the Potomac and Rappahannock rivers, known as the Northern Neck, and here he built the original Stratford House, which was burned some years after. In the later edifice, erected by his grandson, Thomas Lee of Stratford, were born the distinguished brothers, Richard Henry Lee (1732-94), mover of the resolution in favour of American Independence and a signer of the Declaration; Francis Lightfoot Lee (1734-97), a signer of the Declaration; and William (1737-95) and Arthur Lee (1740-92), diplomatists. There also, on 19th January 1807, was born the subject of this sketch, the son of General Henry Lee, a cousin of the preceding. At the age of eleven he lost his father, and at eighteen he entered the Military Academy at West Point. He graduated second in his class in 1829, and received a second-lieutenant's commission in the engineers. In 1832 he married Mary Custis, daughter of George Washington Parke Custis, adopted son

of George Washington, and grandson of his wife by her first marriage. He became first-lieutenant in 1836, and captain in 1838. At the beginning of the Mexican war in 1846 he was appointed chief-engineer of the central army in Mexico. General Winfield Scott praised him highly in official reports for his services at the siege of Vera Cruz. At the storming of Chapultepec he was severely wounded, and for meritorious services received his third brevet promotion in rank. In 1852 Colonel Lee was in command of the United States Military Academy, and in the three years of his administration greatly improved its efficiency as a training school for officers. His next service was as an officer of cavalry on the Texan border in 1855-59. When on a furlough in October 1859, the time of the John Brown raid, he was put in command of a small force and ordered to Harper's Ferry to capture the insurgents. Colonel Lee was in command of the department of Texas in 1860, but was recalled to Washington early in 1861 when the 'irrepressible conflict' between the free and the slave states seemed imminent. When Lee reached the capital in March 1861, seven states had passed ordinances of secession from the Union, and had formed the Southern Confederacy. Virginia seceded from the Union on April 17, and Colonel Lee, believing that his supreme political allegiance was due to his state rather than to the Union, felt compelled to send his resignation to General Scott, which he did on the 20th of April. The bitter struggle between his personal preferences and his high sense of duty is shown in the words of his wife, written to a

friend at the time. ‘My husband has wept tears of blood over this terrible war; but he must as a man and a Virginian share the destiny of his state, which has solemnly pronounced for independence.’ Within two days after his resignation from the United States army he was made commander-in-chief of the military and naval forces of Virginia.

General Lee was devoutly religious, and a life-long member of the Protestant Episcopal Church. His purpose to draw his sword only in defence of his native state was modified by its joining the Southern Confederacy, and the change of the capital from Montgomery, Alabama, to Richmond, Virginia. When the Confederate Congress met in Richmond, with representatives from eleven states, in May 1861, five brigadier-generals were appointed, of whom Lee ranked third. He had at first no active command, but remained at Richmond to superintend the defences of the city till the autumn, when he was sent to oppose General Rosecrans in West Virginia. In the spring of 1862 he was sent to supervise the coast defences of Georgia and South Carolina; but when McClellan’s ‘on to Richmond’ advance with 100,000 men was assured, Lee was summoned to the capital. General Joseph E. Johnston, chief in command, was disabled by a wound at the battle of Seven Pines, May 31, 1862, and Lee was put in command of the army around Richmond. The masterly strategy displayed by Lee, and the desperate fighting of his army in the famous seven days’ battles around Richmond, defeated the purposes of McClellan’s Peninsular campaign, and belong rather to the history of the war

than to personal biography. The same may be said of his battles and strategy in opposing General Pope's movements, his invasion of Maryland and Pennsylvania, and other prominent events of the war. The increasing resources of the North and the decreasing resources of the South could only result in the final success of the former. It was no news to Lee to be told of 'the hopelessness of further resistance' by General Grant in his note of April 7, 1865, and the common desire of both commanders 'to avoid useless effusion of blood' was creditable to both. On April 9, 1865, Lee surrendered his army of about 26,000 men to General Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia, and the four years' war was practically ended. That General Lee undertook ill-judged movements, as his advance into Pennsylvania, and that he trusted too much to his lieutenants in matters of importance, has been the opinion of some critics; and probably his unwillingness to throw blame on government officials who planned, and on subordinates to whom he entrusted the execution of the plans or parts of them, has given more apparent than deserved grounds for such criticisms. After the close of the war he frankly accepted the result, and although deprived of his former property at Arlington on the Potomac, and the White House on the Pamunkey, he declined proffered offers of pecuniary aid, and accepted the presidency of Washington College, since called the Washington and Lee University, at Lexington, Virginia. Here he devoted himself assiduously to the proper duties of a college president, gaining the affectionate esteem of the faculty and students

as he had of the officers and soldiers of two armies in former years.

Exposure in the field in 1863 had resulted in rheumatic inflammation of the pericardium, which became more painful and frequent from exposure to cold or violent exercise, till a severe attack in 1869 greatly impaired his heart's action. From a second attack, in September 1870, he did not recover, but grew weaker till his death, October 12, 1870. His widow died in Lexington, Virginia, November 6, 1873. General Lee had three sons and four daughters. The eldest son, George Washington Custis Lee, graduated at the head of his class at West Point in 1854, resigned as first-lieutenant in the United States army in 1861, was an aide-de-camp to Jefferson Davis, 1861-63, major-general of a division of the army of northern Virginia in 1864, and successor of his father as president of the Washington and Lee University in 1871. William Henry Fitzhugh Lee, the second son, was an officer in the United States army, and major-general of cavalry in the Confederate army. He was elected to the 50th and 51st congresses. Captain Robert E. Lee of the Confederate cavalry was the third son.

A bronze equestrian statue of General Lee, by Mercié of Paris, erected mainly by the women of the South, was unveiled in Richmond, Virginia, in 1890. The height of the whole structure, including an elaborate monumental pedestal, is 61 feet 2 inches, the equestrian figure being 22 feet 2 inches. See the Life by John Esten Cooke (1871), and Gen. A. L. Long, *Memoirs of Robert E. Lee* (1887).







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